DECISION RECORD

Reference: Environmental Assessment for Grazing Authorization, #NM-060-99-164

Decision: It is my decision to authorize the issuance of a five year grazing lease to John Lamay for the Bureau of Land Management grazing allotment #63222. The lease will authorize 2 cows at 100% Federal Range from September 1 to September 11 of each year for 1 Animal Unit Month (AUM). The area to be grazed will be fenced with a one strand electric fence during the period of grazing as outlined in the Final Decision dated May 27, 1999. Any additional mitigation measures identified in the environmental impacts sections of the referenced environmental assessment have been formulated into stipulations, terms and conditions. Any comments made to this proposed action were considered and any necessary changes have been incorporated into the environmental assessment.

If you wish to protest this proposed decision in accordance with 43 CFR 4160.2, you are allowed 15 days to do so in person or in writing to the authorized officer, after the receipt of this decision. Please be specific in your points of protest. In the absence of a protest, this proposed decision will become the final decision of the authorized officer without further notice, in accordance with 43 CFR 4160.3. A period of 30 days following receipt of the final decision, or 30 days after the date the proposed decision becomes final, is provided for filing an appeal and petition for the stay of the decision, for the purpose of a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge (43 CFR 4.470).

The appeal shall be filed with the office of the Field Office Manager, 2909 West Second, Roswell, NM, 88201, and must state clearly and concisely your specific points.

Signed by T. R. Kreager 8/13/99
Assistant Field Manager- Resources Date

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
for
GRAZING AUTHORIZATION

ALLOTMENT 63222

EA-NM-060-99-164

May, 1999

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Roswell Field Office
Roswell, New Mexico

I. Introduction

When authorizing livestock grazing on public range, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has historically relied on a land use plan and environmental impact statement to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). A recent decision by the Interior Board of Land Appeals, however, affirmed that the BLM must conduct a sitespecific NEPA analysis before issuing a permit or lease to authorize livestock grazing. This environmental assessment fulfills the NEPA requirement by providing the necessary site-specific analysis of the effects of issuing a new grazing lease on allotment 63222.

The scope of this document is limited to the effects of issuing a grazing lease. Other future actions such as range improvement projects will be addressed in a project specific environmental assessment. There are no current plans for additional management actions on this allotment.

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The purpose of issuing a new grazing lease would be to authorize livestock grazing on public land on allotment 63222. The lease would specify the types and levels of use authorized, and the terms and conditions of the authorization pursuant to 43 CFR §§4130.3, 4130.3-1, 4180.1 and 4130.3-2.

B. Conformance with Land Use Planning

The Roswell Resource Management PI an/Env! ron mental Impact Statement (October 1997) has been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the land use plan's Record of Decision. The proposed action is consistent with the RMP/EIS.

C. Relationships to Statutes, Regulations, or Other Plans

The proposed action is consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1700 et seq.); the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 (43 U.S.C. 315 et seq.), as amended; the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.), as amended; the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1535 et seq.) as amended; the Federal Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (43 U.S.C. 1901 et seq.); Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management and Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands.

II. Proposed Action and Alternatives

A. Proposed Action:

The proposed action is to authorize John Lamay a five year grazing lease for 2 cows for the period of September 1 to September 11 at 100% Federal Range for 1 Animal Unit Month (AUM) on allotment 63222.

B. No Change Alternative

This alternative would not issue a new grazing lease. There would be no livestock grazing authorized on public land within allotment 63222.

III Affected Environment

A. General Setting

Allotment 63222 is located in Lincoln County, on the south edge of the Nogal townsite just south of State Road 37. The public land is a tract that totals 5 acres. The lease for grazing is only for the public land and therefore does not reflect the total number of livestock for the entire ranch unit.

This allotment lies outside the Roswell Grazing District boundary established subsequent to the Taylor Grazing Act (TGA). Overall livestock numbers for the ranch are not controlled. The amount of forage produced on public land is the determining factor on the number of authorized livestock for the public land.

The landscape is gently sloping, deep soiled area just out of the bottom of Nogal Canyon. The elevation is 6500 feet. More detailed information of the area is discussed under the affected resources section.

The following resources or values are not present or would not be affected: Prime/Unique Farmland, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Floodplains, Minority/Low Income Populations, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Hazardous/Solid Wastes, Wetlands/Riparian Zones. Native American Religious Concerns. Cultural inventory surveys would continue to be required for public actions involving surface disturbing activities.

B. Affected Resources

1. Soils: The Soil Survey of Lincoln County Area New Mexico describes the soils as Tortugas-Ruidoso- Rock outcrop association. The native vegetation is mainly pinion, juniper, short grasses, and mid grasses. Elevation is 4500 to 6000 feet. The average annual precipitation is 13 to 17 inches, the average annual air temperature is 45 to 56 degrees F, and the average frost free period is 160 to 180 days. Specific soils information can be reviewed in the mentioned soil survey.

2. Vegetation: This allotment is within the pinyon-juniper vegetative community as identified in the Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS). Vegetative communities managed by the Roswell Field Office are identified and explained in the RMP/EIS. Appendix 11 of the draft RMP/EIS describes the Desired Plant Community (DPC) concept and identifies the components of each community. The distinguishing feature for the pinion -juniper community is that the area does have the potential to have pinion, juniper, or mountain mahogany in the description of the potential plant community. The primary consideration for inclusion into this community type is the influence of topography, elevations, and slopes. This community type has smaller areas that are scattered throughout other types such as grasslands. The existing vegetation consist of grasses such as hairy grama, sideoats grama. The

shrub and tree species include yucca, pinion, one-seed juniper, and alligator bark juniper.

3. Wildlife: Game species occurring within the area include mule deer, mourning dove, and elk. Raptors that utilize the area on a more seasonal basis include the Swainson's, red-tailed, and ferruginous hawks, American kestrel, and great-horned owl. Numerous passerine birds utilize the grassland areas due to the variety of grasses, forbs, and shrubs. The most common include the western meadowlark, mockingbird, horned lark, killdeer, loggerhead shrike, and vesper sparrow. Reptiles include a variety of snakes, lizards, and amphibians.

A general description of wildlife occupying or potentially utilizing the proposed action area is located in the Affected Environment Section (p. 3-62 to 3-71) of the Draft Roswell RMP/EIS (9/1994).

4. Threatened and Endangered Species: The only known threatened or endangered species of plants or animals on allotment 63222 is the bald eagle. A list of federal threatened, endangered and candidate species reviewed for this EA can be found in Appendix 11 of the Roswell Approved RMP (AP1 1-2). Of the listed species, avian species such as the bald eagle and peregrine falcon may be observed in the general geographic area during migration or winter months. There are no designated critical habitat areas within the allotment.

5. Livestock Management: The allotment is used in conjunction with the adjacent private land for grazing cows. The public land is used for 10 days in the fall after the growing season.

6. Visual Resources: The allotment is located within a Class IV Visual Resource Management area. This means that contrasts may attract attention and be a dominant feature in the landscape in terms of scale. However, the changes should repeat the basic elements of the landscape.

7. Water Quality: No perennial surface water is found on the Public Land on this allotment.

8. Air Quality: Air quality in the region is generally good. The allotment is in a Class 11 area for the Prevention of Significant Deterioration of air quality as defined in the public Clean Air Act. Class 11 areas allow a moderate amount of air quality degradation.

9. Recreation: Recreation opportunities are limited in this grazing allotment because the small acreage of the isolated parcel but there is good public access.

Recreation activities that aay occur on these public lands are within this allotment are: sightseeing, primitive camping, mountain biking, horseback riding and hiking. Due to the fact that pubic land boundaries are not marked adequately or identified by signs and/or fences the general public land user is reluctant to use the public lands in fear of being in trespass on private land. Off Highway Vehicle designations for public lands within this allotment are classified as "Limited" to existing roads and trails.

10. Cave/Karst: A complete significant cave or karst inventory has not been completed for the public lands located in this grazing allotment. Presently, no known significant caves or karst

features have been identified within this allotment. The allotment is located within a designated area of Low Karst or Cave Potential.

IV. Environmental Impacts

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action

1. Soils: Livestock remove the cover of standing vegetation and litter, and compact the soil by trampling (Stoddart et al. 1975). These effects can lead to reduced infiltration rates and increased runoff. Reduced vegetative cover and increased runoff can result in higher erosion rates and soil losses, making it more difficult to produce forage and to protect the soil from further erosion. These adverse effects can be greatly reduced by maintaining an adequate vegetative cover on the soil (Moore et al. 1979). Proper utilization levels and grazing distribution patterns are expected to retain sufficient vegetative cover on the allotment, this will maintain the stability of the soils. Soil compaction and excessive vegetative use will occur at small, localized areas such as bedding areas and along trails. Positive affects from the proposed action may include acceleration of the nutrient cycling process and chipping of the soil crust by hoof action may stimulate seedling growth and water infiltration.

2. Vegetation: Vegetation will be removed and trampled by domestic livestock as well as other herbivores. Ecological condition and trend is expected to remain stable and/or improve over the long term with the proposed authorized number of livestock and limited time grazing.

3. Wildlife: Domestic livestock will utilize vegetative resources needed by a variety of wildlife species for life history functions within these allotment. The magnitude of livestock grazing impacts on wildlife is dependent upon the species of wildlife being considered, and it's habitat needs. Cover habitat for wildlife will remain the same as the existing situation.

4. T&E species: Livestock grazing as a result of the grazing lease will have no affect on the bald eagle and peregrine falcon. It is expected that habitat and range condition would be maintained or improved by authorizing grazing conducive with vegetation goals. Habitat for wintering bald eagles would not have significant negative impacts by livestock grazing since there is limited riparian and aquatic habitats nearby , and no active or suitable nesting habitat.

5 Livestock Management: Livestock will be grazed under strict compliance to the number of cows and the dates set by the BLM. No adverse impacts are anticipated under the proposed action.

6. Visual Resources The grazing of livestock would not affect the form or color of the landscape. The primary appearance of the vegetation within the allotment will remain the same.

7. Water Quality -. Direct impacts to surface water quality would be minor, short-term impacts during storm event.. Indirect impacts to water-quality related resources, such as fisheries, would not occur. The proposed action would not have a significant effect on ground water.

8. Air Quality: Dust levels under the proposed action would be slightly higher than under the no grazing alternative due to allotment management activities. The levels would still be within the limits allowed in a Class 11 area for the Prevention of Significant Deterioration of air quality.

9. Recreation: Grazing would have little or no affect on the recreational opportunities, since the grazing will only occur for ten day each year. Recreation activities that could occur within this grazing allotment are not limited by lack of public access.

10. Caves/Karst: No known significant caves or karst features are known to exist on the public lands located within this allotment. Grazing would not affect the karst resources.

B. Impacts of the No Livestock Grazing Alternative.

1. Soils: Soil compaction would be reduced on the allotment around old trails and bedding grounds, there would be a small reduction in soil loss on the allotment.

2. Vegetation: It is expected that the number of plant species found within the allotment will remain the same, however, there would be small changes in the relative percentages of these species. Vegetation will continue to be utilized by wildlife. There would be an increase in the amount of standing vegetation.

3. Wildlife: Wildlife would have no competition with livestock for forage and cover.

4. T&E Species: There would be no impacts to threatened or endangered species or habitat.

5. Livestock management: The forage from public land would be unavailable for use by the lessee. If the No Grazing alternative is selected, the owner of the livestock would be responsible for ensuring that livestock do not enter Public Land [43 CFR 4140.1 (b)(1)].

6. Visual Resources: There would be no change in the visual resources.

7. Water Quality: There could be a slight improvement in water quality due to the minor reductions in sediment loading during storm events.

8. Air Quality: There would be a slightly less dust under this under this alternative versus the proposed alternative, but this would be negligible when considering all sources of dust.

9. Recreation: Impacts would be the same as the proposed action.

10. Caves/Karst: Impacts would be the same as the proposed action.

V. Cumulative Impacts

Grazing of allotment 63222 as proposed will have no cumulative impacts.
The No Grazing alternative was considered, but not chosen in the Rangeland Reform

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Record of Decision (ROD) (p. 28). The elimination of grazing in the Roswell Field Office Area was also considered but eliminated by the Roswell RMP/ROD (pp. ROD-2).

VI. Residual Impacts

Field checks of this parcel of public land have shown that grazing, at the current leased numbers of animals, is sustainable. If the mitigation measures are enacted, then there would be no residual impacts to the proposed action.

VII. Mitigating Measures

If new information surfaces that livestock grazing is negatively impacting other resources, action will be taken at that time to mitigate those impacts.

VIII. Summary

The fundamentals of rangeland health are identified in 43 CFR §§4180.1 and pertain to watershed function, ecological precesses, water quality and habitat for threatened and endangered (T&E) species or other special status species. Based on the best available data and professional judgement, the evaluation of this environmental assessment indicates that the fundamentals of rangeland health exist on allotment 63222.

IX. Literature Cited

Moore, E., E. Janes, F. Kinsinger, K Pitney, and J. Sainsbury. 1979. Livestock grazing management and water quality protection - state of the art reference document. EPA 910/9-79-67. Envir. Prot. Agen. Seattle, WA 147 pp.

Stoddart, L.A., A.D. Smith, and T.W. Box. 1975. Range Management. Third Ed. McGraw-Hill, Inc., New York. 532 pp.

X. Fundamentals of Rangeland Health

The fundamentals of rangeland health are identified in 43 CFR §§4180.1 and pertain to watershed function, ecological process, water quality, and habitat for threatened and endangered (T&E) species and other special status species. Based on the available data and professional judgement, the evaluation by this environmental assessment indicates that the conditions identified in the fundamentals of rangeland health exist on this allotment.

XI. BLM Team Members

Jim Schroeder, Hydrologist
John Spain, Rangeland Management Specialist
Tim Kreager, Area Manager, (reviewing for Hazardous Waste Specialist)

Irene Gonzales-Salas, Realty Specialist
Jerry Dutchover, Minerals Geologist
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Pat Flanary, Archeologist
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